WALAFRID STRABO

On the Cultivation of Gardens

A Ninth Century Gardening Book

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By WALAFRID STRABO

Translated by James Mitchell

with a Foreword by Richard Schwarzenberger

Ithuriel's Spear

San Francisco

For Francesca Rosa

Flos pretiosa in hortulo.

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FOREWORD

—by Richard Schwarzenberger

THE MOST CONSPICUOUS THING in the garden is the gardener. Here in his *Hortulus*, to give the book its traditional name, is Walafrid with his grubby and calloused hands, instructing and amusing his pupils. They call him Strabo, squinty-eyes, and mock his ham-fisted enthusiasms, and avoid getting too close to his enveloping arms, his salty, astringent smell. Secretly they admire him for his oddities, and for the history he hints at and they embroider. He was tutor to Charles the Bald, the grandson of Charlemagne, but supported his brother Lothar when the kingdom was divided. He was in exile for two years before the third brother, Ludwig the German, brought him back to Reichenau.

Now he is back at his abbey, writing and reclaiming the garden from nettles. You can't be afraid of hard work, he writes (predictably—he comes from Swabian peasant stock). If you work hard and pay attention your garden will yield its fruits, even if your "soil is crap." Once the admonitions have been proffered, he can pursue his real ambition, to "grace small things with reverence for them." This sounds modest, but is not easily accomplished, as poetry seldom is. He begs his Muse to help with the heavy lifting, and the Muse pitches in, but she's only so good for so long. The theater of operations, the "inner physical encroachments," will tax even the most accommodating Muse.

Thus there are only twenty-three plants featured in the *Hortulus,* comprising a pharmaceutical alphabet; *a*ntimony, *l*ovage, *p*ennyroyal, *h*orehound, *bet*ony. To keep things from flagging, and to entertain the boys, Walafrid sprinkles in fanciful bits: he advises taking horehound "if evil stepmothers mix up poisonous substances/ and slip them in your drink;" antimony, if "an enemy's steel has injured our limbs" (in the ninth century, perhaps not so fanciful. Fennel is "supposed to be good/ if your eyes are darkened by shadows." From what causes we can only wonder.

When he and his Muse are "too tired to travel further down the road," Walafrid the pastor takes over, metaphors blazing. The rose and the lily are "symbols of the highest honors of the Church." The rose is "a benefaction/ representing the blood of the martyrs." If the "snow-white bud" of the lily is crushed, the fragrance "quickly dissipates," just as the "passions of illicit love" destroy Holy Chastity's ability to "blossom forth and shine." The boys, except for those who will follow in Walafrid's clerical footsteps, do with these homilies what boys have always done: ignore them as best they can.

Though lyrical descriptions are plentiful, only the peaches, glimpsed in the dedication high up in the "broken shadows" of Grimaldus' garden, appear entirely in the purview of pleasure. The "cheerful pupils" will soon pluck them, trying to encircle the large ones with their hands, and place the "tender, fuzzy fruit" in Grimaldus' hand. It is a sunny moment, reverential and carnal, and its light shines throughout the *Hortulus*.

Introduction

—by James Mitchell

WALAFRID STRABO was born in the later years of the reign of Emperor Charlemagne, in 808 or 809. He came from the area in southwest Germany then called Alemannia, which included the modern province of Baden-Württemberg, and which bordered areas of Switzerland and France located around the Bodensee, or Lake Constance. Destined for a career as a churchman, he was dropped off by his parents at the age of eight or nine in the monastery at Reichenau, an island in the Bodensee. Here he learned to read and write Latin in the monastery school, and prepared for a life to be spent in monastic orders. He went on to become abbot of the same monastery in 838, and it was possibly during this period that he wrote his gardening book, *On the Cultivation of Gardens*, widely regarded since its rediscovery in Renaissance times as one of the great books of the early Middle Ages.

Walafrid the Churchman

The famous Benedictine monastery where Walafrid spent most of his formative years was located on the small but beautifully situated island of Reichenau, in the western arm of the Bodensee. It was founded by Saint Perminius in 724 and became one of the major religious and cultural foundations of the era, enjoying the special protection and the sponsorship of the Carolingian kings. Like most of the royal monasteries it operated

a school to teach Latin and liturgical practice to the child oblates—young boys who were left in the monasteries by their parents to become monks. At a certain period, children of the nobility were also sent to school in the monasteries. Consequently these monasteries with schools attached emerged as the foremost cultural institutions of their time, due to the emphasis placed on the teaching of reading and writing Latin, the use of classical Roman texts as models, the maintenance of the classical tradition through the continued copying of these texts in the monastery *scriptoria,* and the creation of elaborate, hand-written manuscripts to be used by the Christian community.

In terms of culture and literacy, Reichenau was a leading player in the "Carolingian Renaissance," along with its sister monasteries at St. Gall, Fulda, and Lorsch. As the result of a catalog of books and manuscripts made at Reichenau around 822, we know that the monastery library contained about 450 titles, a very competitive number for that period. Walafrid was likely familiar with most of them, having proved an exceptionally bright student and demonstrating great skill in Latin composition. His performance was duly noted, and he received as it were a scholarship to study at Fulda Monastery 826-829, where he worked with the famous writer and teacher Hrabanus Maurus, and made friendships which lasted his whole life.

In 829 he was called to the imperial court at Aachen to serve as a tutor for Charlemagne's grandson Charles (Charles the Bald)—the son of the reigning emperor, Ludwig the Pious. Walafrid stayed at court until 838 when his student had finished his education, and he was rewarded for his efforts with the abbacy of Reichenau. The appointment of bishops and abbots by reigning monarchs seems unusual to us today, but it was a standard practice in the early Middle Ages. Walafrid remained at Reichenau till his death despite a forced two-year absence in Speyer, during which his political allegiance was re-assessed and then eventually confirmed by

Ludwig the German, the new king of East Francia. At age 40 or 41, Walafrid drowned in the River Loire on August 18, 849 while on a diplomatic mission from Ludwig the German to Charles the Bald. He was buried at Reichenau, and Hrabanus Maurus wrote an epitaph for him, praising him as a faithful guardian of his monastery.

Walafrid the Writer

We remember Walafrid Strabo today chiefly for his book on gardening, but contemporaries would have been more familiar with his religious texts, which constitute the majority of his writings. In addition to a number of liturgical hymns and several major devotional poems, his prose works include an important history of religious rites and observances of the church, a collection of glosses on Biblical passages, biographies of Saints Othmar and Gallus, and his editions of Einhard's life of Charlemagne and Thegan's life of Louis the Pious, to which he added his own introductions.

On the Cultivation of Gardens

Walafrid's book qualifies as the first contribution to gardening literature in medieval European history. Despite many references to cultivated gardens in antiquity, this is the first work that articulates what exactly the gardener is growing, explains the benefits and properties of the plants involved, and gives some idea of how they are to be looked after. Most of the plants are grown for their medicinal value, as one might expect in an age when pharmacology was almost entirely based on herbal remedies, and their redemptive qualities are explained in some detail. The majority of physical complaints pertain to

digestive issues, unsurprising in an age when inadequate food storage must have produced a lot of belly-aches.

A total of twenty-nine plants are mentioned by Walafrid, and we include a list of the herbal plants with their Latin names after this introduction. A few, such as Indian pepper, pomegranate, and peach trees, are not actually grown by the author, who mentions that his garden included several more plants than he describes. And we ought not to be misled that his garden looked anything like our modern idea of a kitchen herb garden. Raising the beds walled with planks must have created a certain order to its appearance, yet the majority of these plants were big bushy affairs. A good resource for judging their appearance can be found online at Wikipedia, where all of them are individually pictured and described by name. It is interesting to note that many of the alleged benefits and remedies of the plants have altered considerably in popular estimation since Walafrid's times.

The garden itself was located on the south side of the monastery, presumably very close to the cloister building, since a passage on gourds describes the tendrils curling over the arched hallways and climbing up the steep roof. A modern reconstruction of the garden has been made by horticultural enthusiasts at the modern site of the monastery at Reichenau. Only the apse crossing in the interior of the church, now called the Marien-Münster, or St. Mary's Abbey Church, survives from Carolingian times. The monastery itself was secularized in 1803.

Walafrid's Latin

Literacy in Carolingian times meant the ability to read and write Latin, since the local vernacular languages had not yet been organized into writing. This would have been of reduced utility anyway due to the universal application of Latin as the language of government and of the Church. Priests of course needed to know Latin to recite the Mass, and

also required it for chanting the entire Psalter every twenty-four hours, not to mention the prescribed daily readings from the Bible during mass. In an environment where perhaps ninety-five per cent of the population was illiterate in any language, the teaching of Latin grammar was a primary and a crucial course of study in the monastic schools and in the cathedral schools.

Another contributing element was the principal method of recruitment employed in the larger monasteries, namely that of child oblation, which meant that boys were simply dropped off to become monks, usually between six to eight years of age. Schooling was required for the *oblati,* and, for a time, children of the aristocracy also attended the schools. Consequently these monasteries, with their libraries and *scriptoria* dedicated to the copying of manuscripts and production of illuminated pages, qualified as educational institutions, and therefore they served as the primary means of transmitting culture throughout the Carolingian era.

Certainly under these circumstances some students might excel as Latinists, and the career of Walafrid Strabo provides an admirable example, particularly in terms of his phenomenal ability to compose poetry in Latin hexameter. This talent was recognized early on by his teachers: at the age of fifteen Walafrid received a commission from his instructor, Tatto, to compose verses on behalf of Ebbo, Archbishop of Rheims, and more hexameters were sent to a bishop at Trier, in which the young author says that he wrote "as a mouse to a giant."

On the Cultivation of Gardens may interest us primarily for its botanical knowledge and its love of gardening which transcends the centuries, but it is also a tour-de-force in Latin verse composition. Probably the primary source for Walafrid's versification technique is Virgil's *Georgica,* an extensive poem written in 2188 hexameters. It was completed by 29 BCE, and Virgil wrote it as a celebration of agriculture and the rural life. It is likewise very garden-friendly in its content. Walafrid's Latin is essentially classical in style; medieval variants had not

yet had a chance to assert themselves into scriptorial practice. A good example of his skill in describing an intricate subject in verse can be found in Section Eight, where the author goes to somewhat exceptional length to show that his melons are as round as soap bubbles blown through the fingers:

"They look like shiny bubbles clinging to your hands as you rub some soap, before the fresh foam disappears in the running water. As long as the froth sticks to your entwined fingers, you can make a little crevice between your hands and purse your lips and blow some warm air into it, forming the flimsy stuff into a glassy ball in the hollow of your hands which wavers at the point where your arched fingers join together."

These lines are barely manageable in English prose, but they are worked out very nicely in the original hexameters, and they show an absolute mastery of Latin vocabulary and usage. Walafrid is also fond of alliteration, as in this line from Section 10:

Et coenam cyatis cogatur claudere crebris.

In Section 3, the following consecutive verses, which mention plants growing in a spot without rain, are followed at each principal hexameter caesura with a Latin word beginning with *p*, creating a sort of vertical alliteration:

Arescat tecto, pluviarum et muneris expers
Squaleat aerii, pars illa perennibus umbris
Diffugiat solem, paries cui celsior ignei....

Internal rhymes delight the poet as well, as for example the end-syllables ending with *-at* in a line from Section VI:

Febribus obstat enim, telum fugat, adiuvat artus....

Walafrid's person

It is always a discouraging aspect of early medieval study that because biographical sources are so limited, our knowledge of the personalities involved must suffer accordingly. Given the political nature of Walafrid's career—his selection as tutor for Charlemagne's grandson, his imperial appointment as abbot of Reichenau Monastery, his diplomatic service for Louis the German—one might suppose him to be ambitious or eager for high office, but nothing of the sort emerges from his writings. We find instead a kindly and modest personality, rather unworldly, obviously well-disposed towards the life of a monastic scholar, always lamenting his absence when away from his *Augia felix*, the Happy Isle of Reichenau, very far removed in distance and accessibility from the various focal points of Carolingian political activity. What keeps Walafrid's garden book from being just an antiquarian literary exercise is the fact that the author really *is*—like all true gardeners before and after—concerned about the well-being of his plants, that he constantly fusses about watering them and treating them properly, that he appreciates their unique restorative abilities, and that he regrets he doesn't have time to celebrate all of them individually in verse.

Walafrid gave himself the surname Strabo, meaning a person who squints. He mentions this a few time in his earlier writings, from which we can infer that he was probably cross-eyed (strabism). It doesn't seem to have slowed him down any, either from reading and writing, or from gaining favor with his teachers and superiors.

When he was a young student in his teens at Fulda Monastery, he also formed a romantic friendship with a fellow student named Gottschalk. This young monk from the Saxon nobility later got in trouble with Church authorities for advocating predestinarian views and was publicly whipped, despite urgent cautionary exhortations from Walafrid. Poems which can be described fairly enough as deeply felt homo-

erotic love poems were sent by Walafrid to a young cleric named Liutger, and the garden book itself makes reference to Priapus and the tragic love affair between Apollo and Hyacinth. And there is perhaps something atmospherically erotic in the dedication of the book, in which the young boys of the monastery school line up to present their peaches to Father Grimaldus.

Walafrid's world

Scholars of the early European middle ages are confronted with a relative lack of documentation about the daily social and economic life of people living in the ninth and tenth centuries. Although the important events in the life of Charlemagne are described in the early biographies by Einhard and Notker, who also contribute a number of anecdotal details about the Emperor's character and personality, documentary evidence informing us about Carolingian personalities and destinies dwindles rapidly as one descends the social scale. The result is that much scholarly detective work is required to form a more comprehensive view of the social and cultural life of the period. Clues need to be gathered and pieced together from very diverse sources, including archaeological research, drawings found in the margins of monastic manuscripts, or even contemporary versions of lives of the saints. Thus the process of historical analysis becomes almost automatically one of reconstruction from only partially available sources.

In this respect Walafrid's garden book also provides a few significant clues about life in the Carolingian era. We learn that gourds are good for carrying wine around with you. Benefits obtained from iris root include its use as a fulling agent in the production of linen from flax, which in turn confirms that linen was being manufactured at the time—presumably to make undergarments for wear under woolen outer garments—since silk and Egyptian cotton,

in view of their comparative scarcity, could only have been worn by the rich. Walafrid also says that clary mixed with honey tastes good, which implies that bee-keeping, in an era that lacked sugar cane and sugar beet as sweetening agents, must have been a popular enterprise.

Indian pepper likewise appears to be a hot item, since the Gauls pay high prices to import it from India, whereas Indians will pay top-dollar to buy pennyroyal from traders in Gaul. If Walafrid's evaluation is correct, we have a unique indication that Gauls of the early ninth century were conducting an import business with products originating in India, conveyed across the Mid-East presumably by Muslim traders. This is an early free trade policy which Walafrid is able to endorse enthusiastically in Section 19:

> For whatever is seldom to be seen under one part of the sky is readily available in other parts of the earth, in such quantity there as the cheapest things are here. Prosperous kingdoms abroad pay good money for articles which may appear to us valueless. Thus one country profits from another, and the whole world in all its parts constitutes a single household.

Text history and English translations

The oldest surviving manuscript of Walafrid's gardening book is written in a very perfect Caroline miniscule hand, and seems to have been created in the second half of the ninth century, some time after the death of our author. Inventoried in the library of St. Gall in 1461, the manuscript came into the hands of a scholar named Melchior Goldast, who deposited it in a library at Bremen in 1624. It was next sold to Queen Christina of Sweden, who donated it to Cardinal Azzolini at her death in Rome in 1689. The Cardinal then gave it to the Vatican Library the year following, where it has reposed ever

since as *Codex Vaticanus Latinus bibliotheca reginae 469*. There exist three other medieval manuscripts, which however are incomplete or were copied much later.

The first printed edition in Latin was published in Vienna in 1510, and again in Nuremberg the year following, by the Swiss humanist Joachim von Watt, who had discovered the manuscript in the library at St. Gall. It was von Watt who first printed it under the title *Hortulus,* or Little Garden, and this title has stuck with the book in many subsequent printed editions.

The first English translation was published by the Stanton Press of Wembley Hill, Middlesex, in 1924 under the title *Hortulus, or the Little Garden*. This is a limited fine arts edition of 132 copies, printed by hand in red and black. It was introduced with the words, "Hortulus is here for the first time done into English verse from the Latin by Richard Stanton Lambert and decorated with cuts on wood by Elinor Lambert MCMXXIII."

The first American translation, and until now the only one, was published in 1966 by the Hunt Botanical Library of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in a limited edition of 1500 copies. Entitled simply *Hortulus*, the work is capably translated by Raef Payne and includes a detailed commentary by Wilfrid Blunt. This edition is invaluable to scholars, since it is the only one that includes a complete facsimile reproduction of the original St. Gall manuscript, on vellum, from the Vatican library. The Hunt Library edition also features linoleum cuts by Harry Evans, a San Francisco Bay Area botanical artist and printmaker. Dr. Elizabeth McClintock, a celebrated taxonomist and for several decades a botanist at the California Academy of Arts and Sciences in San Francisco, also served as a consultant to the project. The participation of Dr. McClintock and Mr. Evans, now both deceased, with the Hunt Library edition lends a certain San Francisco ambience to Walafrid's book, and the editors of Ithuriel's Spear, an independent press in San Francisco, are happy to follow them down the garden path. Dr. McClintock's

books are still available online, as are many other of Evans' botanical prints (www.henryevans.com).

Further reading

Little has been written about Walafrid Strabo in English, apart from the standard entries in medieval encyclopedias and reference works. Most of his other, non-horticultural writings have not been translated, being mainly of interest only to historians and scholars of the early medieval Church. The most extensive biography of Walafrid remains the chapter dedicated to him by Eleanour S. Duckett in her well-known work *Carolingian Portraits* (Michigan, 1962), which also describes the lives of several of his contemporaries and provides background about the age in which they lived. The poems written for Walafrid's friend Liutger referenced above in this introduction are available in Thomas Stehling's *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship* (Garland Publishing, 1984), pp. 16-18.

— *James Mitchell*

Walafrid's Garden

Agrimony (Agrimonia eupatoria) 68
Betony (Betonica officinalis) 66
Catmint (Nepeta cataria), Catnip 72
Celery (Apiam graveolens) 64
Chervil (Anthriscus cerefclium) 50
Clary (Salvia sclarea) 56
Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare) 44
Gourd (Lagenaria siceraria) 34
Horehound (Marrubium vulgare) 42
Iris (Iris germanica) 46
Lily (Lilium candidum) 52
Lovage (Levisticum officinale) 48
Melon (Cucumis melo) 38
Mint (Mentha viridis) 58
Pennyroyal (Mentha pulegium) 60
Poppy (Papaver somniferum) 54
Radish (Raphanus sativus) 74
Rose (Rosa gallica), French rose 76
Rue (Ruta graveolens) 30
Sage (Salvia officinalis) 28
Southernwood (Artemesia abrotanum) 32
Tansy (Tanacetum vulgare) 70
Wormwood (Artemesia absinthium) 40

The Marienmünster on Reichenau Island—the Minster of Saints Mary and Mark—is today a Catholic parish church. The monastery was founded in 724 in a simple wooden building, and the first abbey church was next built of stone at 40m in length later in the same century. Visitors are welcomed and can inspect a restoration of Walafrid's garden, which is shown here and described in the following pages.

On the Cultivation of Gardens

Incipit liber de cultura hortorum Strabi seu Strabonis feliciter.

commendatio opusculi

Haec tibi servitii munuscula vilia parvi
Strabo tuus, Grimalde pater doctissime, servus
Pectore devoto nullius ponderis offert,
Ut cum consepto vilis consederis horti
Subter opacatas frondenti vertice malos,
Persicus imparibus crines ubi dividit umbris,
Dum tibi cana legunt tenera lanugine poma
Ludentes pueri, scola laetabunda tuorum,
Atque volis ingentia mala capacibus indunt,
Grandia conantes includere corpora palmis:
Quo moneare habeas nostri, pater alme, laboris,
Dum relegis quae dedo volens, interque legendum
Ut vitiosa seces, deposco, placentia firmes.
Te deus aeterna faciat virtute virentem
Inmarcescibilis palmam comprendere vitae
Hoc pater, hoc natus, hoc spiritus annuat almus.

Here begins the book on cultivating gardens by Strabo. May it proceed well.

DEDICATION

Most Learned Father Grimaldus,[1] your servant Strabo dedicates to you this modest gift, a small work of no significance, but one which comes from an obedient heart. Thus you'll have something, kind Father, to remind you of my labors, when you sit in the fenced enclosure of your small garden, in the shade of your fruit trees with their leafy crowns, where peaches rest at the top in the broken shadows, and where the boys, your cheerful pupils, pluck the pale, tender, fuzzy fruits and place them into your palms, as they try to encircle the large peaches in their own hands. And as you read this work written in your honor, I ask you to dismiss its faults and accept anything that might please you. May God keep you vigorous in eternal virtue, and may the palm tree of imperishable life shelter you. May the gracious Father, Son and Spirit grant you this.

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1. Father Grimaldus was Walafrid's good friend and teacher at Reichenau Monastery, and when this book was written, he had probably become Abbot of St. Gall Monastery, 841-872. Walafrid depicts him in his peach tree orchard, surrounded by boys at play in the monastery school.

I. DE CVLTVRA HORTORVM

Plurima tranquillae cum sint insignia vitae,
Non minimum est, si quis Paestanae deditus arti
Noverit obsceni curas tractare Priapi.
Ruris enim quaecunque datur possessio, seu sit
Putris harenoso qua torpet glarea tractu,
Seu pingui molita graves uligine fetus,
Collibus erectis alte sita, sive iacenti
Planitie facilis, clivo seu vallibus horrens;
Non negat ingenuos holerum progignere fructus,
Si modo non tua cura gravi compressa veterno
Multiplices holitoris opes contemnere stultis
Ausibus assuescit, callosasque aere duro
Detrectat fuscare manus et stercora plenis
Vitat in arenti disponere pulvere qualis.
Haec non sola mihi patefecit opinio famae
Vulgaris, quaesita libris nec lectio priscis;
Sed labor et studium, quibus otia longa dierum
Postposui, expertum rebus docuere probatis.

I. ON THE CULTIVATION OF GARDENS

Among the many signs of a quiet life, not the least results when a person dedicates himself to the art of Paestum[2] and learns to attend to the concerns of randy Priapus.[3] However the plot of land is shaped, whether the soil is crap and lies paralyzed with sand and gravel, or if it's rich and moist and produces heavy fruits; whether it lies high up on a hillside or rests on an agreeable plain lined with ditches or slopes—no matter how it lies, your land will certainly produce the fruits of our native plants—assuming your attention doesn't grow numb and falter, and you don't foolishly squander the gardener's resources, and as long as you aren't afraid of going outdoors and getting calluses all over your grubby hands, and dumping baskets of cow-plop onto the parched soil. I didn't learn about this from people's chatter, or from looking at a lot of old books, or spending long days doing nothing—I gained my expertise through hard work and experience.

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2. A town in Italy, about 85 km southeast of Naples, famous for its Greek temples and its rose gardens, which bloomed twice each year.

3. Priapus was a son of Dionysus and Aphrodite. He was revered as a god of fertility, and statues which portrayed him with an enormous erection and oversized balls were placed in gardens and fields to guarantee an abundant crop. For the Romans, his statue was also used as a scarecrow, and his erect penis was thought to frighten thieves. Epigrams collected in *Priapeia,* a collection of ninety-five, mostly obscene poems about Priapus, indicate his intention to sodomize any garden invaders: "I warn you, my lad, if I do seize you... you'll be so stretched that you will think that your anus never had any wrinkles" (*Priapeia* 10).

II. DIFFICVLTAS ASSVMPTI LABORIS

Bruma senectutis vernacula, totius anni
Venter et ampliflui consumptrix saeva laboris,
Veris ubi adventu terrarum pulsa sub imas
Delituit latebras, vestigiaque horrida avarae
Ver hiemis reduci rerum delete pararet
Schemate, et antiquo languentia rura nitori
Reddere ver orbis primum caput et decus anni
Purior aura diem cum iam reserare serenum
Inciperet, Zephyrosque herbae floresque secuti
Tenuia porrigerent radicis acumina, caeco
Tecta diu gremio canasque exosa prumas;
Cum silvae foliis, montes quoque gramine pingui,
Prataque conspicuis vernarent laeta virectis:
Atriolum, quod pro foribus mihi parva patenti
Area vestibulo, solis convertit ad ortum,
Urticae implerunt campique per aequora parvi
Inlita ferventi creverunt tela veneno.
Quid facerem? Tam spissus eras radicibus infra
Ordo catenatis, virides ut texere lentis
Viminibus crates stabuli solet arte magister,
Ungula cornipedum quando humore nocetur
Collecto et putres imitatur marcida fungos.

II. DIFFICULTY OF THE CHOSEN TASK

Winter, the companion of old age, has savagely devoured and consumed all the fruits of our labor—but eventually Winter will be driven back into the depths of the earth by the arrival of Spring. The true origin of our world, the jewel of the year returns, and prepares to wipe out the rough traces of greedy Winter, restoring the dull fields to their former glory. Fresh air brightens the cheerful daytime, and gentle breezes incite the herbs and flowers to shoot forth slender tips from their roots, long hidden in the dark frosty hateful womb of Winter. The woods are enlivened with fresh foliage, and the hills with grass, and the rich meadows joyfully turn green before our eyes. But in the small open courtyard in front of my door, a little patch of land facing east, a crowd of stinging nettles has completely taken over, covering the whole area with burning poison. What am I going to do? The roots are tangled in the earth like the wicker mats a stable-boy weaves of branches when moisture rots the hooves of horses and they go soft like mushrooms.

Ergo moras rumpens Saturni dente iacentes
Aggredior glebas, torpentiaque arva revulsis
Sponte renascentum complexibus urticarum
Erigo et umbricolis habitata cubilia talpis
Diruo, lumbricos revocans in luminis oras.
Inde noti coquitur flabris solisque calore
Areola et lignis, ne diffluat, obsita quadris
Altius a plano modicum resupina levatur.
Tota minutatim rastris contunditur uncis,
Et pinguis fermenta fimi super insinuantur.
Seminibus quaedam tentamus holuscula, quaedam
Stirpibus antiquis priscae revocare iuventae.

Getting right down to work, I grab hold of Saturn's toothed tool[4] and break the clods of earth, turning over the numb soil, attacking the recidivous nettles, crushing the tunnels of moles and summoning earthworms into the light of day. Then the south winds and the mild sunshine come and warm up the little garden. To keep it from being washed away, we raise the earth a little into rectangular beds and frame the garden with some planks. The soil is broken up into small clumps with a rake, and rich yeasty fertilizer worked into it. We try to coax forth some of our herbs from seeds, others we try to rejuvenate from old roots.

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4. A hoe with two prongs. Mentioned by Virgil in *Georgica, 406, curvo Saturni dente.*

III. INSTANTIA CVLTORIS ET FRVCTVS OPERIS

Denique vernali interdum conspergitur imbre
Parva seges, tenuesque fovet praeblanda vicissim
Luna comas; rursus si quando sicca negabant
Tempera roris opem, culturae impulsus amore,
Quippe siti metuens graciles torpescere fibras,
Flumina pura cadis inferre capacibus acri
Curavi studio et propriis infundere palmis
Guttatim, ne forte velocior impetus undas
Ingereret nimias et semina iacta moveret.
Nec mora, germinibus vestitur tota tenellis.
Areola et quamquam illius pars ista sub alto
Arescat tecto, pluviarum et muneris expers
Squaleat aerii, pars illa perennibus umbris
Diffugiat solem, paries cui celsior ignei
Sideris accessum lateris negat obice duri:
Non tamen illa, sibi fuerant quae credita pridem,
Spe sine crementi pigro sub caespite clausit.
Quin potius, quae sicca fere et translata subactis
Suscepit scrobibus, redivivo plena virore
Restituit reparans numeroso semina fructu.
Nunc opus ingeniis, docili nunc pectore et ore,
Nomina quo possim viresque attingere tantae
Messis, ut ingenti res parvae ornentur honore.

III. PERSEVERANCE OF THE GARDENER AND THE FRUITS OF HIS LABORS

Then Spring rains sprinkle our little crop, and the gentle moon takes turns refreshing the delicate sprouts. But if a dry spell should refuse benevolent rainfall, I'd be apprehensive that the tender roots might wither from thirst, and the love I feel for the plants would inspire me with enthusiasm and diligence to fetch fresh water in brimming buckets. I pour the water drop by drop, avoiding a sudden deluge that might spill too much water and wash away the planted seedlings. Soon enough the little plot is completely covered with germinating plants. And even if that part of the garden which lies under the high roof is dry and dusty due to a lack of rain and moistening dew, and even if another part lies in continual shadow, missing the sunlight because a high wall of hard bricks blocks the appearance of the fiery star, nonetheless the garden hasn't left buried anything I've entrusted to it, or left it infertile in the soil without hope of growth. Instead, the garden has brought to life all the shriveled stocks and seeds assigned to its furrows. Full of green power, it promises a copious harvest. But now all my skill is required—and my learning and eloquence as well—to present the names and virtues of the gathered fruits, and thus to grace these small things with my reverence for them.

IV. SALVIA

Lelifagus prima praefulget fronte locorum,
Dulcis odore, gravis virtute atque utilis haustu.
Pluribus haec hominum morbis prodesse reperta,
Perpetuo viridi meruit gaudere iuventa.
Sed tolerat civile malum; nam saeva parentem
Progenies florum, fuerit ni dempta, perurit,
Et tacit antiquos defungier invida ramos.

IV. SAGE

Sweet-smelling sage grows in abundance right at the front of my garden. It has a forceful energy and produces a healing drink. Helpful with many human ailments, it merits eternal youth. But the shrub suffers from an internal conflict: often its offshoots will injure the parent stem—unless the new growth is hacked away, it will maliciously kill off the old branches.

V. RVTA

Hoc nemus umbriferum pingit viridissima rutae
Silvula caeruleae, foliis quae praedita parvis
Umbellas iaculata breves, spiramina venti
Et radios Phoebi caules transmittit ad imos,
Attactuque graves leni dispergit odores.
Haec cum multiplici vigeat virtute medellae,
Dicitur occultis adprime obstare venenis,
Toxicaque invasis incommoda pellere fibris.

V. RUE

Bluish rue in dark green bushes animates this shaded grove. It has tiny leaves which almost don't cast shadows: they let the breath of the wind and the rays of Phoebus penetrate down the stem. At the faintest touch it releases a powerful fragrance. Rue has various internal effects—people say it will relieve hidden toxins and expel harmful substances from their troubled bowels.

VI. ABROTANVM

Pubentis frutices, et quas inspicat aristas
Ramorum ubertas, tenues imitate capillos.
Huius odoratum lento cum vimine crinem
Paeoniis carptum prodest miscere medellis.
Nec minus abrotani promptum est mirarier altae
Febribus obstat enim, telum fugat, adiuvat artus
Quos incerta premit furtivae iniuria guttae.
Praeterea tot habet vires quot fila comarum.

VI. SOUTHERNWOOD

Equally admirable are the tall bushes of southernwood, whose luxuriant branches unfold themselves like gentle feathers or fine hair. The scented leaves and supple stems can be mixed together successfully into healing medicines. These combats fevers, banish side pains and help limbs besieged by insidious gout. Indeed this bush has as many good uses as it does leaves, which are fine like hair.

VII. CVCVRBITA

Haud secus altipetax semente cucurbita vili
Assurgens, parmis foliorum suscitat umbras
Ingentes, crebrisque iacit retinacula ramis.
Ac velut ulmum hedera implicuit cum frondibus altam,
Ruris abusque sinu toti sua brachia circum
Laxa dedit ligno, summumque secuta cacumen
Corticis occuluit viridi tutamine rugas;
Aut arbustivum vitis genus, arbore cum se
Explicuit quavis, ramorumque alta corymbis
Vestiit et propria sursum se sponte levavit,
Visitur ergo rubens aliena in sede recemus
Dependere, premit tabulata virentia Bacchus,
Pampinus et frondes discernit latior altas:
Sic mea sic fragili cum stirpe cucurbita surgens
Diligit appositas sua sustentacula furcas,
Atque amplexa suas uncis tenet unguibus alnos.
Ne vero insano divelli turbine possit,
Quot generat nodos, tot iam retinacula trudit,
Et quoniam duplicem producunt singula funem,
Undique fulturam dextra laevaque prehendunt.
Et velut in forum nentes cum pensa puellae
Mollia traiciunt, spirisque ingentibus omnem
Filorum seriem pulchros metantur in orbes.

VII. GOURD

Gourds also grow up high from modest seeds. Their leaves look like shields and cast huge shadows, and they send out their tendrils from several different branches. You know how ivy encircles tall elms, how it wraps its arms around the tree trunk on the ground and then hides the rough bark all the way to the top in a covering mantle of green leaves. And you know how grapevines growing in an orchard will climb up a tree and hang grapes on the top branches, pulling themselves upwards by their own strength—how reddish grapes hang from alien branches, and Bacchus sags down through a carpet of green, while vines proliferate and penetrate the canopy of foliage. The gourd plant rises up from weak seedlings and, in a similar fashion, clambers up a supporting trellis, and grasps the alder branches with its coiling shoots. So that no raging storm can tear it loose, it sends out just as many shoots as there are knots which need to be tied, and since each tendril then bifurcates, each joint on the trellis is doubly tied left and right.

Sic vaga tortilibus stringunt amenta catenis
Scalarum teretes involvuntque ilico virgas,
Viribus et discunt alienis tecta cavarum.
Ardua porticuum volucri superare natatu.
Iam quis poma queat ramis pendentia passim
Mirari digne! quae non minus undique certis
Sunt formata viis, quam si tornatile lignum
Inspicias medio rasum quod mamfure constat.
Illa quidem gracili primum demissa flagello
Oblongo tenuiique ferunt ingentia collo
Corpora, tum vastum laxatur in ilia pondus,
Totum venter habet, totum alvus, et intus alunturur
Multa cavernoso seiunctim carcere grana,
Quae tibi consimilen possunt promittere messem.
Ipsos quin etiam tenero sub tempore fructus,
Ante humor quam clausa latens per viscera sero
Autumni adventu rarescat et arida circum
Restiterit cutis, inter opes transire ciborum
Saepe videmus et ardenti sartagine pinguem
Combibere arvinam, et placidum segmenta saporem
Ebria multoties mensis praestare secundis.
Si vero aestivi sinitur spiramina solis,
Cum genetrice pati et matura falce recidi,
Idem foetus in assiduos formarier usus
Vasorum poterit, vasto dum viscera ventre
Egerimus, facili radentes ilia torno.
Nonnunquam hac ingens sextarius abditur alvo,
Clauditur aut potior mensurae portio plenae,
Amphora quae piceo linitur dum glutine, servat
Incorrupta diu generosi dona Lyaei.

Like spinning girls who pull soft wool over the turning spindle and wind it up row by row into beautiful coils, the shoots from the gourd attach themselves to each rung of the ladder and quickly twine around it. With external support, they even learn how to transcend steep roofs of arched hallways and fly through the air. And who could adequately praise the fruits that form on every branch? They hang on long delicate stalks and swell from slender necks into strong bodies. The shapes swell into an oversized waist and belly, while inside, in a cavernous jailhouse, the seeds grow with promise of yet another fine harvest. As long as the gourd is still soft, and before the juice inside has dried up in late autumn leaving a woody outer shell, the fruits come to the table often with other fine foods, soaking up the fat in a hot pan. People also serve them frequently in juicy slices as a tasty dessert. But of course if you leave the gourd on the vine, let it endure the glowing heat of the summer sun and then chop it off with a knife, you can make a durable container out of it. Just remove the guts from its ponderous belly, then smooth out the inside with a scraping tool. It will hold anywhere from a pint to a half-gallon, and if you seal the vessel with some adhesive pitch, it will preserve the kind gifts of Bacchus unspoiled and potable for many a long day.

VIII. PEPONES

Hoc simul in spatio campi quo figitur imis
Haec tam laeta seges, vili quam carmine pinxi,
Visitur alterius vitis genus acre per aequor
Serpere pulvereum et fructus nutrire rotundos
Pomorum. Haec species terrae super arida vulgo
Terga iacens crementa capit pulcherrima, donec
Solibus aestivis flavos intincta colores
Messoris calathos matura fruge replerit.
Tum videas aliis teretem satis esse figuram
Undique, porro aliis oblongo schemate ventrem
Demissum, nucis aut ovi versatilis instar;
Vel qualis manibus quondam suspensa supinis
Lucet agens circum lomenti bulla salivam,
Ante recens maceretur aquis quam spuma refusis,
Dum lentescit adhuc digitis luctantibus et se
Alternis vicibus studioque fricantibus uno,
Inter utramque manum parvo fit parvus hiatu
Exitus, huc stricto lenis meat ore noti vis,
Distenditque cavum vitrea sub imagine pondus
Et centrum medio confingit labile fundo,
Undique conveniat camuri quo inflexio tecti.
Ergo chalybs huius penetrat dum viscera pomi,
Elicit humoris largos cum semine rivos
Multiplici: tum deinde cavum per plurima tergus
Frusta manu spargens hotorum laetus opimas
Delicias conviva capit, candorque saporque
Oblectat fauces; nec duros illa molares
Esca stupere facit, facili sed mansa voratu
Vi naturali frigus per viscera nutrit.

VIII. MELON

Right where the lush plant I've just described
in my rude song lies rooted in the deep earth, there's
another type of vine that creeps boldly across the
dusty ground and bears round fruits. These lie mainly
on the dry ground, ripening in splendor and turning
the color of the sun before filling the gardener's
baskets with a rich bounty. Some that you see are
of a rather slender shape, while others are quite long
and have a thick belly, like a nut or rounded egg.
They look like shiny bubbles clinging to your hands
as you rub some soap, before the fresh foam
disappears in the running water. As long as the froth
sticks to your entwined fingers, you know how you
can make a little crevice between your hands and
purse your lips and blow some warm air into it,
forming the flimsy stuff into a glassy ball in the
hollow of your hands which wavers at the point
where your arched fingers join together. If a knife
penetrates the insides of the melon, lots of seeds and
rivers of juice flow forth. Divide the hollow fruit into
several pieces by hand and your happy guest will
receive a tasty delight straight from the garden.
The shimmering white pulp delights the gums with its
flavor, and it isn't hard on your molars either. It's easy
to chew and swallow, and it cools off your intestines
with its own natural powers.

IX. ABSINTHIVM

Proximus absinthi frutices locus erigit acris,
Herbarum matrem simulantes vimine lento.
In foliis color est alius ramisque odor alter
Puibericus, longeque saporis amarior haustus.
Ferventem domuisse sitim, depellere febres
Hoc solet auxilium clara virtute probatum.
Si tibi praeterea caput acri forte dolore
Puilsetur subito, vel si vertigo fatiget,
Huius opem rimare, coquens frondentis amaram
Absinthi silvam, tum iura lebete capaci
Effunde et capitis perfunde cacumina summi.
Quo postquam abluieris graciles humore capillos,
Devinctas frondes super imposuisse memento,
Tum mollis foros constringat fascia crines,
Et post non multas eplapsi tempori horas
Hoc inter reliquias eius mirabere vires.

IX. WORMWOOD

Bushes of bitter wormwood grow in the next bed, whose tough branches resemble the Mother of Herbs.[5] But the leaves have a different color, and the twigs smell different when they're full-grown. Also, the taste of wormwood is much more bitter as a drink. It nonetheless quenches burning thirst, and taken as a cordial it will usually drive fever away. If you suddenly get a splitting headache, or if you feel yourself getting dizzy, wormwood brings relief. First, boil the bitter leaves of the leafy plant and then pour the extract out of a large dishover your skull. After you've moistened your fine hair, don't forget to lay some wormwood leaves over it. Then wrap a soft cloth over your moist hair, and after a couple hours you'll be surprised at the effects of the wormwood—and there are many more besides.

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[5] Perhaps Common Mugwort *(Artemisia vulgaris)* is meant, which shares the same genus as Wormwood, (*Artemisia absinthium).*

X. MARRVBIVM

Quid refeream iuxta positi nimiumque potentis
Marrubii non vile genus, licet acrius ora
Mordeat et longe gustum disiungat odore.
Dulce enim olet, non dulce sapit; sed pectoris aegros
Conprimit angores, tristi dum sumitur haustu,
Praecipue talis caleat si potus ab igni,
Et caenam cyathis cogatur claudere crebris.
Si quando infensae quaesita venena novercae
Potibus inmiscent, dapibusve aconita dolosis
Tristia confundunt, extemplo sumpta salubris
Potio marrubii suspecta pericula pressat.

X. HOREHOUND

What shall I say about horehound, growing
close by, yet no less potent a species?
To be sure, it does burn the mouth,
and it does taste much worse than it smells.
For although it has a sweet fragrance, it
doesn't taste that way at all, and it can relieve
a severe chest pain if you take it as a bitter
draught. This is especially effective if you
drink it right from the fire and force down
several cups after eating. And if some evil
stepmothers mix up poisonous substances
and slip them into your drink, or deceptively
load lethal wolfsbane into your food, then
quickly down a draught of the antidote
horehound and you'll be soon be rid of the
anticipated dangers.

XI. FENICVLVM

Nec marathri taceatur honor, quod stipite forti
Tollitur et late ramorum brachia tendit,
Dulce satis gustu, dulcem satis addit odorem,
Hoc oculis quos umbra premit prodesse loquuntur.
Huius item semen fetae cum lacte capellae
Absumptum ventris fertur mollire tumorem,
Cunctantisque moras dissolvere protinus alvi.
Praeterea radix marathri commixta liquori
Lenaeo tussim percepta repellit anhelam.

XI. FENNEL

And we mustn't stay silent about the fine reputation of fennel, which shoots up enthusiastically and stretches out its branches like far-reaching arms.
It tastes rather sweet, matching its fragrance.
It's supposed to be good if your eyes are darkened by shadows. Its seeds, when drunk with the milk of a mother goat, are supposed to alleviate flatulence, and quickly loosen constipation in a sluggish body.
Fennel root mixed with wine will also get rid of rasping coughs.

XII. GLADIOLA

Te neque transierim Latiae cui libera linguae
Nomine de gladii nomen facundia finxit.
Tu mihi purpurei progignis floris honorem
Prima aestate gerens violae iucunda nigellae
Munera, vel qualis mensa sub Apollinis alta
Investis pueri pro morte recens hyacinthus
Exiit et floris signavit vertice nomen.
Radicis ramenta tuae siccata fluenti
Diluimus contusa mero, saevumque dolorem
Vesicae premimus tali non secius arte.
Pignore fullo tuo lini candentia texta
Efficit ut rigeant dulcesque imitentur odores.

XII. IRIS

Nor may I pass you by, Iris, known also as *Gladiola*, a name eloquently derived from *gladius*, the Latin word for sword. You pay me honor with your purple flowers, and in early summer you assume the nature of dark violets, and also of hyacinths, which arose beneath Apollo's altar as a new kind of flower taking the place of the dead, beardless youth, bearing his name on your petals.[6] We crush dried bits of your root and dissolve them in wine, a good remedy for piercing bladder pains. And with your reliable assistance, the fuller stiffens up his linen cloth and bestows your sweet fragrance upon it.

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6. Hyacinth was a beautiful youth whom the god Apollo loved. The two took turns throwing the discus, until Apollo, to impress his beloved, threw it with all his might and accidentally killed him. A different version suggests that the wind god Zephyrus was responsible for Hyacinth's death. The boy's beauty had caused a lovers' rivalry between Zephyrus and Apollo. Consequently Zephyrus blew Apollo's discus off course out of jealousy, and it killed Hyacinth. In mourning, Apollo created a flower from Hyacinth's blood and named it after him. The flower is not the modern hyacinth; it became identified with a number of different plants by medieval authors, some of whom agreed with Walafrid, who designates it the iris.

XIII. LYBISTICVM

Inter odoratam memorare lybistica silvam
Fortia suader amor parvi diffusior horti.
Hoc germen suco quamvis et odore gemellis
Orbibus officere et tenebras inferre putetur,
Semina saepe tamen quaesitis addere curis
Parva solet, famamque aliena laude mereri.

XIII. LOVAGE

My wide-ranging affection for my little garden leads me to remember you, brave lovage, amongst the fragrant bushes. Although it is thought that lovage can injure a pair of eyes and even cause blindness through its sap and odor, nevertheless one often mixes its tiny seeds in with other blended herbs—thus it wins its reputation through the agency of others.

XIV. CEREFOLIVM

Quae tot bellorum tot famosissima rerum
Magnarum monimenta sacro pia conficis ore,
Exiles, Erato, non dedignare meorum
Divitias holerum versu perstringere mecum.
Infirmis divisa licet macedonia ramis
Spargitur et crebris ignobile semen aristis
Sufficit, illa tamen toto reparabilis anno
Pauperiem largo solatur munere plebis
Indiguae nec non restringere sanguinis undas
Corpore diffusas facili soles obvia gustu.
Illa quoque, infesto venter dum forte dolore
Turbatur, fementa super non irrita ducit,
Puleium sibimet frondesque papaveris addens.

XIV. CHERVIL

Erato, you're the muse who has faithfully recorded with sacred speech the glorious memory of so many wars and great deeds,[7] so please don't fail now to lend me your inspiration to versify upon the modest treasury of my herbs. Even if chervil, the Macedonian herb, divides and spreads it branches feebly, and even if its clusters produce only meager amounts of seeds, it nonetheless stays fresh the whole year through, thus giving lavishly of itself to aid the poor condition of those requiring it. For this plant is always at the ready, and if taken moderately, will generally act to curb a hostile inflammation[8] anywhere in the body. And if your belly is plagued by intense pain, poultices made of chervil are especially effective when pennyroyal and poppy leaves are added.

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7. Walafrid may be confusing Erato, the muse of lyric poetry and therefore of love and erotic poetry, with Clio, the muse of history.

8. In Latin, *undae sanguinis*, "waves of blood."

XV. LILIVM

Lilia quo versu candentia, carmine quove
Ieiunae macies satis efferat arida Musae?
Quorum candor habet nivei simulacra nitoris,
Dulcis odor silvas imitatur flore Sabaeas.
Non Parius candore lapis, non narduis odore
Lilia nostra premit; necnon si perfidus anguis
Ingenitis collecta dolis serit ore venena
Pestifero, caecum per vulnus ad intima mortem
Corda feram mittens, pistillo lilia praestat
Commacerare gravi, sucosque haurire Falerno.
Si quod contusum est summo liventis in ore
Ponatur puncti, tum iam dinoscere vires
Magnificas huiusce datur medicaminis ultro.
Haec etiam luxis prodest contusio membris.

XV. LILY

What verses, what song can my starving, dried up
muse bring forth in appreciation of the radiant lily?
White as the shining snow, the sweet fragrance of
its petals can compare with the forests of Saba.
Parian marble can't surpass our lilies in whiteness,
nor spikenard in fragrance. If a wicked serpent,
devious by nature, spits evil venom from its mouth,
and speeds grim death through an invisible wound
into the recesses of your heart—then stir up some
lilies with a heavy pestle and drink the juice together
with Falerian wine. If you rub some of the crushed
lily onto the blue snakebite marks, you'll recognize
the extraordinary powers of this medicinal herb. It
works equally well with large bruises on the limbs.

Saba was at the tip of the southern Arabian peninsula. Balthasar, a king from Saba, presented a gift of frankincense at the nativity of Christ. **Parian marble** is a fine-grained semi-translucent white marble quarried on the Greek island of Paros, highly prized by the ancient Greeks for making sculptures. In the Bible spikenard was used as a costly aromatic ointment, preserved in alabaster boxes, derived probably from *Nardostachys grandiflora,* a plant of the Valerian family. In Mark 14:3 and John 12:3, Mary, sister of Lazarus, uses nard ointment to anoint the head and feet of Jesus. Falerian is a fine Italian wine, prized by the ancient Romans. Walafrid probably means any expensive red wine, or else could be showing off his knowledge of the classics.

XVI. PAPAVER

Et Cereale quidem nugarum in parte papaver
Hac memorare placet, quod raptu maesta puellae
Mater, ut immensis optata oblivia mentem
Exuerent curis, fertur Latona vorasse.
Hoc simul auxilio carbunculus ater ab imo
Pectore qui ructus nimium convolvit amaros
Oris adusque fores reprimi persaepe videtur.
Huius ad alta caput granorum semine fetum
Protento fragilique solet se tollere collo,
Inque modum mali, regio cui punica nomen
Indidit, unius patulo sub pellis amictu
Grana celebrandae virtutis plurima claudit,
Deque sono mandentis habet formabile nomen.

XVI. POPPY

I am pleased to remember here in my simple
verses Ceres' poppy.[9] Latona, mourning
the abduction of her daughter, is said to have
devoured poppy, so that the wished-for oblivion
would liberate her heart from endless sorrow.
It appears that poppy will often help to suppress
a bad ulcer, which, lodged in the chest, will
regurgitate its foul and strangulating exhaust
all the way up to the gates of the mouth.
The head of the poppy is filled with seed grains
and it lifts upward on a bent, weak stem.
Like the pomegranate, named after Punic lands,[10]
it contains numerous seeds of wonderful power
in the husks of its pods. The sound of chewing
gives it the name we know it by now.[11]

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9. *Papaver sominferum,* Ceres is the Roman name for Demeter, goddess of the fruitful earth, who mourned the abduction of her daughter Persephone. Walafrid apparently confuses Ceres with Latona, (Leto in Greek), a Titan goddess who gave birth to Apollo and Artemis.

10. In Latin, *malum Punicum.* Apparently it was thought that pomegranates originated in Carthage.

11. *Pappare,* which sounds like *papaver,* means to chew.

XVII. SCLAREGA

Hic umbrosa novos inter sclarega virores
Stipite praevalido assurgens, ramosque comasque
Altius extollit, quae quamvis rarius ulli
Quaesita auxilio medicorum paene putetur
Effugisse manus, dulci tamen indita caldae
Et vires et odorati fermenta saporis
Praestat; eam iuxta hortensis non extima costi
Silva latet, stomachique moras ventremque salubri
Provocat auxilio, radicis munere coctae.

XVII. CLARY

Here clary grows, casting its shadow over
the fresh greenery, rising on vigorous stalks
and shooting its branches and leaves upwards.
Since it's rarely used for medicinal purposes, you
might think that it dropped out of the hands of
the physicians. But if you put it in some hot
honey-water, it has the same effect as
a potion of fragrant spices. Nearby, costmary
lies concealed, not the least useful of bushes.
If you boil its roots, it will act in a healthy manner
to improve sluggish digestion and lazy bowels.

XVIII. MENTA

Nec mihi defuerit vulgaris copia mentae
Multa per et genera et species diversa coloresque
Et vires: huius quoddam genus utile vocem
Raucisonam claro rursus redhibere canori
Posse putant, eius sucos si fauce vorarit
Ieiuna quem crebra premens raucedo fatigat.
Est aliud praepingue genus huiusce frutecti,
Quod iam non parvi diffundit germinis umbras,
Celsa ebuli sed more petens a stipite forti
Undique maiores foliorum prorogat alas,
Quis odor alter inest pauloque immitior haustus.
Sed si quis vires speciesque et nomina mentae
Ad plenum memorare potest, sciat ilel necesse est
Aut quot Erythraeo volitent in gurgite pisces,
Lemnius aut altum quot in aera Mulciber ire
Scintillas vastis videat fornacibus Aetnae.

XVIII. MINT

Nor shall I ever want for a supply of common mint, which comes in different types and varieties, colors and properties. One kind of mint is thought to restore a clear tone to a hoarse throat. If a person is continually plagued and tormented with a raspy throat, he can clear it right up with a drink of mint on an empty stomach. There's another kind of mint which has a different smell and tastes a little harsher. It grows thick and its foliage casts a large shadow, but like danewort it shoots up high and swings its leaves in all directions. But whoever could enumerate all of the varieties, names and properties of all the mint plants, could doubtless tell you how many fish romp in the Indian Ocean, or how many sparks Vulcan sees flying from his gigantic furnace on Mt. Etna.[12]

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[12] Vulcan's home was on this famous volcanic mountain in Sicily.

XIX. PVLEGIVM

Non patitur cunctas angustia carminis huius
Pulei virtutes celeri comprendere versu.
Hoc apud Indorum tanti constare peritos
Fertur, apud Gallos quanti valet Indica nigri
Congeries piperis. Quis iam dubitare sinetur
Hac herba plures leniri posse labores,
Quam pretiis inhianter emit ditissima tantis
Gens hebenoque auroque fluens et mira volenti
Quaeque ferens mundo? O magni laudanda Tonantis
Virtus et ratio, nullis quae munera terris
Larga suae non pandit opis: quae rara sub isto
Axe videre soles, aliis in partibus horum
Copia tanta iacet, quantam vilissima tecum
Efficiunt; rursus quaedam quae spreta videntur
Forte tibi, magno mercantur ditia regna,
Altera ut alterius potiatur foenore tellus,
Orbis et in toto per partes una domus sit.

XIX. PENNYROYAL

The narrow limitations of my song will not permit me to embrace all the virtues of pennyroyal in these ephemeral verses.
It is reportedly valued as highly by the physicians of India as a whole sack of black Indian pepper amongst the Gauls. Who could doubt that this herb can relieve numerous sufferings, since that worthy folk eagerly pays such a high price for it. Possessing so much ebony and gold, they are in a position to provide the greedy world with all kinds of valuable things. How praiseworthy are the power and wisdom of the thundering god[13] who bestows his helpful gifts so bountifully! For whatever is seldom seen under one part of the sky is readily available in other parts of the earth, in such quantity there as the cheapest things are here. Prosperous kingdoms abroad pay good money for articles which may appear to us valueless. Thus one country profits from another, and the whole world in all its parts constitutes a single household.

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13. *Iuppiter Tonans,* the thundering Jupiter. Walafrid presents himself as an eager advocate of free trade policy in the lines that follow, behind which he perceives divine agency at work.

Puleium quoque decoctum curabit, amice,
Et potu fotu stomachum, mihi crede, morantem.
Dum canimus quae caerta gravi ratione tenemus,
Quaedam audita etiam vero miscere cothurno
Fas usuisque sinit: ramum coniungito pulei
Auriculae, ne forte caput turbaverit aestus
Solis, in ario si te perflarit aperto.
Quod nisi me currens deponere vela Thalia
Cogeret ac tandem portus intrare moneret,
Hic tibi multiplices poteram decerpere flores.

Believe me, my friend, an extract of pennyroyal, taken as a drink or applied as a poultice, will cure a sluggish stomach. Normally we report only what we regard as certain, but in this case custom and usage will allow us to inject a bit of hearsay into our poem: If you stick a twig of pennyroyal behind your ear, then the sun's heat won't make you dizzy when it beats down upon you in the open. If Thalia[14] weren't urgently warning me to take in sail and head for the harbor, I could pick many more flowers for you here.

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14. Thalia is the muse of comedy and idyllic poetry.

XX. APIVM

Quamvis in nostris apium vilesceret hortis
Et solo id multi prodesse sapore putarint,
Plura tamen propriis medicamina viribus acri
Exhibet auxilio, cuius si trita capessas
Semina, torquentes urinae frangere tricas
Dicitur, ipsum etiam tenero cum germine mansum
Concoquit errantes stomachi penetralibus escas.
Corporis hunc regem turbans si nausea vexet,
Mox apium lympha tristique bibatur aceto,
Passio tum celeri ceder devicta medellae.

XX. CELERY

Although celery is often undervalued in our gardens, and in the opinion of many is only useful for its taste, it nonetheless exhibits many medicinal properties of considerable benefit just by itself. If you ingest ground celery seed, it is said that it will relieve sharp pains during urination. If you eat the head together with the tender shoots, celery will digest any foods rumbling around inside your belly. If the stomach, the ruler of the body, is seized by a strangling urge to vomit, quickly drink some celery with water and sour vinegar. The discomfort is vanquished and quickly surrenders to the rapidly acting treatment.

XXI. VETTONICA

Montibus et silvis, prates et vallibus imis
Vettonicae pretiosa licet collectio cunctis
Paene locis superet passim, tamen hanc quoque noster
Hortus habet cultaque docet mansuescere terra.
Haec tantum meruit generali nomine laudis,
Ut si quid mea Musa velit superaddere, tandem
Mole operis devicta sui iam sentiat, illa
Utilitate minus quicquid deprompserit esse.
Hanc viridem si forte tuns coneris in usus
Carpere siccatamve hiemi deponere pigrae,
Turbida sive tuas oblectant pocula fauces,
Seu potius longo tibi defaecata labore
Dona placent, huius virtus mirabilis herbae
Omnia sufficiet; quam quosdam pendere tanti
Novimus, ut contra totam quae iniuria corpus
Impetit interius, muniri viribus eius
Sese posse rati, soleant haurire diebus
Continuis hoc acre genus medicaminis almi.
Praeterea caput infesto si vulnere fractum
Tabuerit, tum crebra terens imponito sacrae
Tegmina vettonicae, statim mirabere wires
Illius, in solidum fuerit dum clausa cicatrix.

XXI. BETONY

Even if precious betony grows in profusion almost everywhere—in mountains and forests, in meadows and deep valleys—our garden embraces it as well, teaching it to become a cultivated plant on tilled soil. Betony has been praised by so many, that my muse, anxious to join the number, would quickly succumb to the challenge, realizing that nothing she could say could contribute to its merit. Whether you pick betony fresh for immediate use, or dry it out and save it for the long winter—whether you drink it in goblets of pulpy fermenting cider or filter it for a long time—whatever you choose to do, the astonishing power of this plant will stand by you. We know that many people regard betony so highly that they think they can protect themselves against inner physical encroachments with its remarkable powers. Consequently they drink some of it every day for its efficacious and curative powers. And if you're struck on the head by an assailant and the wound turns septic, then crush some god-like betony and apply it frequently as a dressing. You'll be astonished how fast its healing power closes the wound and scars it over.

XXII. AGRIMONIA

Hic quoque sarcocolam, campos quae plurima passim
Vestit et effetis silvarum inventa sub umbris
Nascitur, ordinibus facile est discernere pulchris.
Haec praeter varium latae virtutis honorem
Trita domat ventris praedirum et pota dolorem.
Si quae forte chalybs infensus vulnera membris
Indiderit nostris, huius temptare iubemur
Auxilium, partique imponere tunsa patenti
Germina, maturum nacturi hac arte vigorem,
Si tamen addatur mordens cataplasmati acetum.

XXII. AGRIMONY

And here we clearly see agrimony, growing in orderly rows, clothing the fields in profusion, found growing as well in the shadowy forest where nothing else survives. It has numerous virtues, and if it is crushed and then drunk, it will eliminate bad stomach pains. If an enemy's steel has injured our limbs, we'd be well-advised to put the powers of agrimony to the test by pounding its shoots and placing them on an open wound. Thus our strength will soon be restored by this agent of medical skill, especially if sharp vinegar is added to the dressing.

XXIII. AMBROSIA

Haud procul ambrosiam vulgo quam dicere mos est
Erigitur, laudata quidem, sed an ista sit illa,
Cuius in antiquis celeberrima mentio libris
Fit, dubium est multis. Medici tamen arte suapte
Hanc utcumque colunt, tantum quae sanguinis hausta
Absumit, quantum potus ingesserit almi.

XXIII. TANSY

Located close to the agrimony rises a plant which is often called ambrosia. One praises it often by this name, although many doubt if it is the same ambrosia well-known to us from ancient books.[15] In any event, many physicians employ it in their craft, for when drunk, it removes as much blood from the body as the liquid it adds to it.[16]

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15. In Greek mythology, ambrosia is the food, or sometimes the drink, of the gods, which confers immortality.

16. Reinforcing the common view of illness as a chemical imbalance among the four humours carried about in the blood-stream. Balance is restored when bad blood is let from the body.

XXIV. NEPETA

Herbarum in numero, quas hortulus ille recenti
Semper prole creat, nepetae non segnior exit
Surculus, urticam foliis simulantibus, alto
Vertice praegratum late largitus odorem.
Haec variis olim morborum accommoda curis,
Non extrema alias inter decernitur herbas.
Huius enim sucus, roseo commixtus olivo,
Efficit unguentum, laesae quod vulnera carnis
Atque cicatricum deformia signa novarum
Posse abolere aiunt, prisco et reparare nitori,
Et revocare piles, plagae quos forte recentis
Pestis hiulca tulit, sanie taboque peresos.

XXIV. CATMINT

Among the plants our garden produces in constant replenishment, sprigs of catmint grow no less vigorously than the others. Its leaves resemble those of nettles, and the flowers on its crown dispense a very pleasant fragrance. The plant has long been known for its service in the treatment of several illnesses, and therefore it shouldn't be ranked last on the list of herbs. If you mix catmint juice with the oil of roses, it produces an ointment which reportedly closes up flesh wounds and erases disfiguring scar tissue. It restores smooth skin, and restores hair which may have been removed by running sores covered with pus and putrefaction.

XXV RAFANUM

Hic rafanum radice potens latoque comarum
Tegmine sublatum extremus facit ordo videri.
Cuius amara satis quatientem viscera tussim
Mansa premit radix, triti quoque seminis haustus
Eiusdem vitio pestis persaepe medetur.

XXV. RADISH

Here in the last bed we find radishes,
with their mighty roots and spread of leaves.
When coughing shakes your insides, the sharp
root of the radish suppresses it. If you eat
some, or make a drink from crushed radish
seeds,it will very often heal the suffering caused
by this malicious illness.

XXVI. ROSA

Iam nisi me fessum via longior indupediret,
Scrupeus atque novi terreret carminis ordo,
Debueram viburna rosae pretiosa metallo
Pactoli et niveis Arabum circumdare gemmis.
Haec quia non Tyrio Germania tingitur ostro,
Lata nec ardenti se Gallia murice iactat,
Lutea purpurei reparat crementa quotannis
Ubertim floris, tantum qui protinus omnes
Herbarum vicisse comas virtute et odore
Dicitur, ut merito florum flos esse feratur.
Inficit hic oleum proprio de nomine dictum,
Quod quam saepe fiat mortalibus utile curis,
Nec meminisse potent hominum nec dicere quisquam.

XXVI. ROSE

If I weren't too tired to travel further down this road, and if the labor involved with composing an entirely new poem didn't frighten me off, then I would certainly crown my precious rose bushes with gold from the Pactolus[17] and sparkling jewels from Arab lands. Because we in Germany have no Tyrian purple,[18] and since not even vast Gaul enjoys the use of glowing purplish red derived from murex shells, nonetheless our roses make up for it abundantly with their annual display of yellow, purple and dark red flowers. People say that rose petals surpass all other blossoms in their strength and fragrance, and thus roses are correctly called the flower of all flowers. That same power is found in its oil, which bears the same name, and nobody really knows or can say how often the oil from roses[19] has been of benefit in treating the ailments of mortal men.

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17. The Pactolus is a river near the Aegean coast of Turkey which contained gold in its sands. King Midas lost his golden touch by washing his hands in the river.

18. Tyrian purple, also called royal or imperial purple, is an extremely expensive purple-red dye first produced by the ancient Phoenicians in the city of Tyre. It consists of the mucous secretion from a Mediterranean gastropod, a sea snail commonly called the spiny dye murex, *(Murex brandaris).*

19. See Catmint, XXIV above.

XXVII. LILIA FLORES

Huic famosa suus opponunt lilia flores,
Longius horum etiam spirans odor imbuit auras,
Sed si quis nivei candentia germina fructus
Triverit, aspersi mirabitur ilicet omnem
Nectaris ille fidem celeri periisse meatu.
Hoc quia virginitas fama subnixa beata
Flore nitet, quam si nullus labor exagitarit
Sordis et inliciti non fregerit ardor amoris,
Flagrat odore suo. Porro si gloria pessum
Integritatis eat, foetor mutabit odorem.
Haec duo namque probabilium genera inclyta florum
Ecclesiae summas signant per saecula palmas,
Sanguine martyrii carpit quae dona rosarum,
Liliaque in fidei gestat candore nitentis.
O mater virgo, fecundo germine mater,
Virgo fide intacta, sponsi de nomine sponsa,
Sponsa, columba, domus, regina, fidelis amica,
Bello carpe rosas, laeta arripe lilia pace.
Flos tibi sceptrigero, venit generamine Iesse,
Unicus antiquae reparator stirpis et auctor,
Lilia qui verbis vitaque dicavit amoena,
Morte rosas tinguens, pacemque et proelia membris
Liquit in orbe suis, virtutem amplexus utramque
Premiaque ambobus servans aeterna triumphis.

XXVII. LILY FLOWERS

Growing opposite, the glorious lilies offer up their blossoms, exhaling a fragrance which penetrates the air even further. And if someone crushes the buds of these snow-white flowers, he will soon be surprised to discover that the fragrance from the nectar quickly dissipates. In the same manner, Holy Chastity demonstrates her own virtue in that she blossoms forth and shines, as long as sinful coercion doesn't drive it away, and the passions of illicit love do not destroy it. But if she loses the adornment of purity, her sweet fragrance will turn into a vile odor. Both these praiseworthy and famous flowers have been for centuries symbols of the highest honors. The Church gathers roses as a benefaction representing the blood of the martyrs, and bears lilies as a radiant sign of shining faith. O Holy Mary, Virgin and Mother, Mother with a fruitful womb, O Virgin of pure faith, a bride in the name of the bridegroom, O bride, dove, protectress, queen, faithful companion: pluck roses in time of strife, and lilies during glad times of peace. Thus a blossom springs from Mary out of the royal tree of Jesse: the one Savior from an ancient line, whose founder He also is. He sanctified the lilies by means of his teachings and glorious life, and gave the roses their color through his death. For his followers on earth he left behind peace, but also struggle. He unified the merits of both in his death, and he promised triumphant victory as the everlasting reward.

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STRABI SEU STRABONIS

James Mitchell is a San Francisco writer, book publisher, and a student of medieval history. His other books of translations include *Soto Zen Ancestors in China* and *Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin*.

Richard Schwarzenberger lives atop Bernal Hill in San Francisco where he writes about gardens for the *East Bay Monthly* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. His first essay collection *In Faro's Garden* appears under the pen name R.E. Faro and is also published by Ithuriel's Spear.